The Curious Case of the Boiler in the Basement; a Mount Savage Thriller

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It started when I received a curious phone call from a friend of mine recently. He lives and works in Florida, but was visiting his sister in their hometown of Mount Savage. He was shown something puzzling by a mutual friend, and called me to investigate it, as he had to return the next day to work. I called the mutual friend, and set up a meeting during Mount Savage Days, 2013. This was one of those phone calls you get once in a lifetime.

Our mutual friend had recently bought the old 5 & 10-cent store in town. Duffy's store closed around 1968. It was built of Mount Savage enameled brick, with pressed tin ceilings. Duffy had purchased the building before World War 2. Duffy (Adolph J. Waitekunas) was the tenant of the store when the boiler was installed. The building was built in 1899, and was not yet completed when the owner, R. H. Brannon, died unexpectedly at the age of 45. The building was owned by Mathew Mullaney, and later sold to Duffy. Duffy died in 2010 at the age of 89.

When he went into the basement, the heating boiler seems strange. He called in his friend (from Florida), whose jaw dropped at the sight of what appeared to be an old locomotive boiler, re-purposed to heat the building. He knew it wasn't built as a stationary boiler, because of the design. He should know, as he is restoring a steam locomotive himself. Boilers intended for mobile use have extra reinforcing, called staybolts, in the boiler to stiffen it against the bouncing and jostling of mobile use.

Why this was all extraordinarily interesting was that there are no known examples remaining of the output of the Mount Savage Locomotive Works. If this were truly an artifact of the Works, it would have to be preserved. The Historical Society was contacted.

A Mister Steven Watkins, recently deceased, saw the boiler installed "sometime before World War II. It came from behind the C&P Shops by mule, and was a "challenge" (not his choice of words) to get into the basement due to weight, and the size of the door.

The Mount Savage Locomotive Works was an outgrowth of the Mount Savage Iron Works, and the later rolling mill facility. It was in 1844 that Mount Savage was put on the nation's map with the rolling of the first iron rail in the United States. After this claim to fame, Mount Savage became the fifth largest city in Maryland. Mount Savage had the natural advantage of nearby supplies of coal, iron ore, limestone, and fire clay.

The blast furnaces at Mount Savage turned out pig iron. This was later worked into wrought iron, and processed in a rolling mill after reheating to form railroad rails. When the B&O Railroad entered Cumberland from Baltimore in 1845, the train arrived on rails imported from England. The Mount Savage train met them on homemade product. This was a game-changer for the Industrial Revolution in the U.S.

Locomotives were repaired at Mount Savage, the *Baltimore Engines* of Ross Winans. Later, Master Mechanic James Millholland began full locomotive production. The records have been lost, but perhaps a hundred units were built for mainline service between 1868 and 1917. Most of these were rebuilt numerous times. As far as is known, the last C&P locomotive was scrapped in 1953.

Smaller locomotives for mining and logging operations were developed by ex-Mount Savage Works Master Mechanic T. H. Paul. Paul had a shop in Frostburg, at the bottom of Depot Hill, but most of the smaller locomotives were built under contract at Mount Savage. The C&P shops were doing $10,000 a month worth of work for Paul in the period 1881 through July of 1884. The last Paul engine was out of service in 1948.

The period beginning in 1883 was a busy one for heavy manufacturing in Mt. Savage. A locomotive catalog was issued for the Works by their agent, Thomas B. Inness & Co. of Broadway, New York. The catalog listed five types of engines for sale. Numerous sales resulted. Narrow gauge engines proved so popular a product that the works installed a third rail up the main line from Mt. Savage for customer acceptance testing. The narrow gauge equipment, 4 of the 5 types listed in the catalog, was the entire Paul pattern. These were narrow-gauge, 3-foot spacing between the rails, as contrasted with the standard gauge of 4 feet, 8 ½ inches. The author has traced 24 Paul locomotives, built in Mount Savage, across the United States, and one in Cuba. None are definitively known to exist.

The 1883 Catalog of the Mount Savage Works gives the specifications for the four Paul engines, and the standard gauge 2-8-0 wheel arrangement Consolidation.

If we could match any of these numbers to the measurements of the boiler in the basement, we would have a good indication that it was a Mount Savage product.

T. H. Paul Locomotives built in Mount Savage

Parameter	American	Logging	Mogul	Mogul	Consolidation
Boiler thickness	tbd	3/8”	5/16”	3/8”	
Diameter	43”	31”	43”	48”	
Firebox	3/8”	3/8”	3/8”	3/8”	
Firebox size	48” x 19”	41” x 22 “	65” x 19”	68” x 23”	
Flue sheets	7/16”	7/16”	7/16”	¾”	
Number of flues	130	55	130	143	
Inside diameter	2”	2”	2”	2”	

Armed with this data, we headed off to the basement to take pictures and do measurements. The boiler was mounted on two brick pedestals, one under the firebox and one under the smokebox. The smokestack was extended over to the chimney with galvanized pipe. An electric stoker/fan *IronFireman* assembly was controlled by a timer and steam-pressure gauge arrangement. That unit still operated. The firebox was partially lagged in asbestos. The steam dome was tied into the building's plumbing for the radiators. The firebox door was a replacement, and there was no builder plate of identifying marks on the unit.

Results of measurements on actual boiler

Boiler diameter	25"	
Number of flues	31	
Inside diameter	1 7/8"	
Boiler length	54"	
Total length	119"	from boiler backhead to smokebox front

Well, this was disappointing. The small number of flues indicated that this unit was not a T. H. Paul boiler. Further research was called of. It was suggested by a Master Mechanic with extensive knowledge of steam that the boiler resembled that of a tractor engine, used to plow fields. What seemed to confirm this were some brackets at the front of the firebox, where the steering gear would have been attached.

As I researched for this article, I came across another possibility. In Amanda Pauls' book on Mount Savage, there is a picture of a parade locomotive built by Jim Lancaster. It is still in town, and resembles the boiler in the basement. Now, perhaps the basement unit was actually built in town after all.

What elese lurks in the attics and basements of Mount Savage?

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